

LATINO AMERICAN COMMISSION

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Mission Statement: The mission of the Latino -American Commission is to serve as a voice in the Nebraska State Government for Latino Americans/ Latinos.

Vision Statement: The vision of the Latino -American Commission is to empower the Latino Community through a pro-active approach to issues that affect their access to educational, political, economical and social opportunities in Nebraska.

2015 Hispanic Heritage Month Commemoration

The 9th Annual Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration took place on Friday, October 9, at the Capitol Building in Lincoln, Neb.

The Commemoration, hosted by the Nebraska Latino American Commission (NLAC) was sponsored by McDonald's, Southeast Community College, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo and Humanities Nebraska, began with a ceremony in the Capitol second floor Rotunda at 3:30 p.m.

The event observes Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 as Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska and recognizes students and community leaders for their role in helping the Latino population.

Adrian Sanchez, Chair of the NLAC Board of Directors, gave the Welcome to the audience of 150 people. German Murguia, representing the Consulate of Mexico, provided Opening Remarks in Spanish sharing the overall influence of Latin America to the United States naming notable Hispanic Americans such as Cesar Chavez and Dr. Ellen Ochoa for making a difference.

Nebraska Governor Pete Ricketts presented the State Proclamation observing Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska. He also spoke of how students can give back to their communities. Chris Beutler, Mayor of the City of Lincoln, also presented a City Proclamation recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month within Lincoln and shared how Latinos are a large part of the population and have improved the city.

Six Nebraska students, two organizations and three community leaders were honored at this year's Commemoration. NLAC Director Dr. Lazaro Spindola served as emcee.

The Keynote Speaker was Nita Gonzales, daughter of Latino civil rights leader Corky Gonzales from Denver. Nita is the current director of Escuela Tlatelolco in Denver, a school that focuses on Latino students and includes a Mexican-American Studies curriculum. She is also an education and Chicano rights activist who was honored by President Obama as a Leader for Change at the White House.

She concluded her speech by reciting her favorite passage from her father's most famous poem, "I Am Joaquín."

"I am the masses of my people and I refuse to be absorbed. I am Joaquín. The odds are great, but my spirit is strong, my faith unbreakable, my blood is pure. I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ. I shall endure, I will endure!" she said to a standing ovation from the audience.

Sanchez presented the four Hispanic Heritage Month awards: Senator John McCollister (District 20) and former Senator Jeremy Nordquist (District 7) received the Humanitarian Award for their introduction and support of LB 623; the Inspiration Award was given to Luis Sotelo of Lexington for his school and community leadership; the Organization Award was given Madison Public Schools for initiatives to help their Latino student population; and Scottsbluff's Our Lady of Guadalupe Church received the Event Award for their Annual Fiesta, which has been celebrating Mexican culture for over 40 years.

The event concluded with the recognition of the winners of the Hispanic Heritage Month Essay Contest. As a theme, students were asked to write about a quote from Julian Castro, former mayor of San Antonio, Texas, on achieving the American Dream, and how the quote relates to them.

Out of 287 entries, the winners in the high school division were, from first through third place: Hillary Carrillo of Lexington High School, Pamela Canté of Lincoln's North Star High School and Martin Lagunas Nava of Omaha's Bryan Senior High School.

In the middle school division, the winners were, from first through third place: Noah Randolph of Omaha's Brownell-Talbot Middle School, Divith Rajagopal of Lincoln's Lux Middle School and Yair Garcia of Schuyler Middle School.

The first place essays were read at the event, and both the essays and information on Hispanic Heritage Month were published on McDonald's tray liners at each McDonald's restaurant in the state.

After the ceremony, El Centro de las Americas hosted a reception at El Mariachi Taco Cantina in Lincoln. The event and food was completely free to the public, with donations being accepted to help Lincoln resident Felix Valle's medical support bills.



*Lazaro Arturo Spindola
NLAC Executive Director*

Latino American Commission Commissioners

Adrian Sanchez (Chair)

Jack Gutierrez (Vice Chair)

Maria Valentin (Secretary)

Daniel Castillo

Norma de la O

Chabella Guzman

Aida Olivas

Ramon Otero

Leticia Rodriguez

Deyanira Salgado

NLAC Staff

Lazaro Arturo Spindola. M.D.
Executive Director

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A Message from the Executive Director

We welcome the new year and prepare for all that 2016 will offer.

We concluded 2015 with our Latino Summit and Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration, both in October. Our Latino Summit in Kearney received 800 Latino students and we are proud to welcome new schools such as Kimball who were able to participate this year with a group of students. Thank you, Spanish teacher Patricia Sulu for taking the initiative to bring your students to our event.

Our Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration this year was our best-attended yet, with more than 120 people in the audience and two school field trips from North Star High School and Lexington High School. Nita Gonzales was an inspirational speaker who moved everyone with her vigor and passion for Latinos to be proud and fearless. If you have ideas for our 2016 event, you are welcome to share them.

This year is going to be a very important year, we will be having elections including a Presidential election this upcoming year. It is important for every American citizen to register to vote and vote in the local elections, the primary election and eventually the Presidential election. You can learn about each candidate in your local newspaper or online, I recommend you learn as much as each candidate as possible, not only their platform, but also their stance on every issue and vote for the candidate that you like best. The best way to make your voice heard is to vote. If you do not know which district you are in, or which candidate is yours, visit: http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_find.php

If you are an American citizen over 18 and have not registered to vote, you can now register online at the Secretary of State's website at: <https://www.nebraska.gov/apps-sos-voter-registration/> Online voter registration is also available in Spanish, I did the translation for them. Translating important state documents is one of our mandates and a service we provide to the legislature.

We are ready for the 2016 Nebraska Legislative Session, which begins on January 6, 2016. Are you ready?

Dr. Arturo Spindola
Executive Director, Latino American Commission

Thank You, Jose Santos



(Above Right) Jose Santos was recognized by NLAC Chair Adrian Sanchez at the Nov. 21st Quarterly Meeting for his many years of dedication and service as the NLAC Governor's Representative on the Board of Commissioners, a role he served since 2000 when he was appointed by Governor Mike Johanns. Santos retired as Commissioner in Spring 2015 when he retired from the Dept. of Labor. (Above Left) Santos hardly ever missed a meeting, in 2012 he helped recognize former Commissioner Gina Ponce at a Quarterly Meeting.

Hispanic Heritage Month Essay First Place Winners

2,081 Miles for the American Dream

By: Hillary Carrillo, Lexington High School, 12th Grade

When my parents had their sons, they instantaneously knew that they wanted their boys to live a better life and have more worthy childhood memories than they did. What they wanted to achieve was the American Dream. After years of hard work and determination, my parents moved to Nebraska and settled down in a small town. Eventually they had me, born a United States citizen. As Julian Castro put it, "The American Dream is not a sprint, or even a marathon, but a relay. Our families don't always cross the finish line in the span of one generation." These words are precise and appertain to my family. Being Hispanic has significance to me because without my roots, I would not be who I am. I appreciate and embrace my culture, which is why my family's story of happiness, love and distress is one of eleven million others.

Castro's quotation, "But each generation passes on to the next the fruits of their labor," essentially applies to my parents. My grandmas and grandpas, from both sides of the family, never had to travel for the American Dream because they carved out their dreams in Guatemala. However, my parents wanted a less harsh life for their children, something they never experienced in their childhood. They wanted to live the American Dream in the United States. In order to do so, they would have to travel 2,081 miles through many obstacles. To me, Castro's words mean we should never give up, even during our hardships. That may well be a cliché, but I wholeheartedly think that if we have motivations, positivity and we work hard, we can achieve our own American Dream.

Many Hispanics immigrate to the United States to make a better life for themselves. A majority of people who come want to rise from poverty and have a "rags to riches" story for their family. Knowing my family went through these obstacles made me question my family roots and gave me the drive to do some research on my heritage. My mother came to this country before my father did and worked as a maid in Beverly Hills. After my father came, they moved to a small town in Nebraska to follow in the footsteps of my uncle. Once in Lexington and their own home, my two older brothers came to join them, eleven and the other seven. Upon coming to the U.S., they told me how they struggled to learn English. After graduating high school, they went off to college. Juanjo, the middle sibling, has a degree in Public Relations and now works in New York City. My older brother, Erick, is still in college earning his degree in Civil Engineering. Both paved their own dreams, and I am positive there are many more to come.

Castro's quotation, although I recently heard it for the first time, has influenced me. It made me communicate with my parents about their experiences. Some of the stories they told me were melancholy, but there were lots of joyful ones too. Upon hearing these stories, I embrace my heritage and want to research my Guatemalan roots, and I am appreciative of my parents. I would not be here if my parents had not followed their American dream. The United States with its wealth of diversity is like a big salad bowl. However, I am appreciative of the diversity. Latino culture is interesting and intriguing. From traditions to food, different Latino cultures have many things in common.

Hispanic Heritage Month

By: Noah Randolph, Brownell-Talbot Middle School, 8th Grade

"In the end, the American Dream is not a sprint, or even a marathon, but a relay. Our families don't always cross the finish line in the span of one generation. But each generation passes on to the next the fruits of their labor." – Julian Castro, former mayor of San Antonio, current Secretary of U.S. Housing and Urban Development.

When I read this quote, these words mean to me that not one family can accomplish their goals in one generation. That family has to work hard for many generations to accomplish them.

Some ways in which I can relate to this quote and to Hispanic Heritage Month are my own family. Three generations ago, my dad's parents were picking cotton in fields and had no hopes of going to college. Then my Grandma and Grandpa worked two different jobs and moved a lot just because they wanted my dad to go to college. Now, my dad has an advanced degree in law and works at Union Pacific. In addition, my aunt is Hispanic. Two generations ago, her family dreamed of coming to America. Then her father moved her family to America and now she has two daughters and hopes to send them to a good college.

This quote has influenced my opinion of Hispanic Heritage Month and the values it represents by reminding me of the struggles that my ancestors went through to accomplish the American Dream. My family worked very hard for many generations to get to where we are now and hopefully the next generation of my family will work towards that dream and will pass the torch onto the next generation after that.



(Above) Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler with Middle School Essay Winners Noah Randolph (Left) and Divith Rajagopal (Right). (Above Right) Mayor Beutler with High School Winner Pamela Canté and Middle School Winner Yair Garcia. (Right) Hillary Carrillo reading her first place essay. (Not pictured) Essay Winner Martin Lagunas Nava.



My family agrees on Castro's quotation, and they are happy they made their mark in Lexington, Nebraska. What my parents wanted to achieve when they moved to the United States was the American Dream. With years of hard work and determination my parents were able to achieve their wish. I am proud of being Guatemalan and I appreciate and embrace my culture. I do not shy away from my roots. Julian Castro's quotation relates to my parents as well as eleven million others. Although Hispanic Heritage Month is a month of celebration for different cultures, I am happy to say that I celebrate my Hispanic culture every day in little ways.

NLAC Seeks Information on Adobe Houses

On Oct. 30, the Nebraska State Historical Society and NLAC held a Public Forum at the Guadalupe Center in Scottsbluff requesting the community's help in finding information on adobe houses.

Historically, Latino agricultural workers who traveled to the Scottsbluff area prior to the 1950s would build adobe houses to live with their family for the duration of their work. Many families chose to settle in the area permanently and the adobe houses became permanent homes and new neighborhoods. As time passed, many of the houses were sold and demolished. NLAC and the Historical Society is working together to locate, identify, document and preserve the remaining adobe houses.

Once identified, the buildings may be placed in the National Historic Registry and included in publications on immigrant and settler dwellings. State historical markers are another possibility for the homes.

The Historical Society and NLAC agree that recognizing and preserving these early adobe houses are important for the state's history and culture.

The Forum was hosted by Rev. Sorensen and NLAC Commissioner Chabella Guzman. Several members of the community attended including family members such as Charlotte and Enedina Saucedo who have lived in the neighborhood for decades and shared local history and their memories with Society and NLAC staff.

Local resident Lorraine Huerta came forward as a community member who still lives in an adobe house built by her father. The house has been upgraded and renovated over the years, but it is still a historic adobe house.

Lorraine and other community members allowed NLAC and Society staff to take photographs of their homes (photos at right), described floor plans and shared the history of their homes.

Members of the public who live in an adobe house, know someone who lives in an adobe house or know where adobe houses are located in Scottsbluff or other areas are encouraged to contact Rev. Sorensen at: pastor@guadalupe-scottsbluff.com, NLAC Commissioner Chabella Guzman at: theindexpaper@gmail.com, or Bob Puschendorf at the Historical Society at 402-471-4769 or email: bob.puschendorf@nebraska.gov.

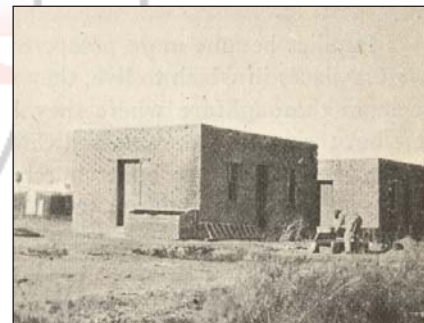
The Society is also creating a Spring internship position for a graduate or undergraduate student to research these houses for this project. The student can be studying Architecture, History, Latino history, Ethnic Studies, Great Plains History or a similar area to qualify for the internship. Interested students are encourage to contact Bob Puschendorf at 402-471-4769 or email: bob.puschendorf@nebraska.gov.

If you are interested in helping with this project, please contact Bob Puschendorf at the Historical Society at 402-471-4769 or email: bob.puschendorf@nebraska.gov.

An update will follow as this project moves forward.



(Above, Top) These are two identified adobe houses on 14th Avenue and H Avenue in Scottsbluff, showing how the surviving houses appear today. (Right) Many adobe houses built in the 1920s have been demolished, these houses in Minatare are no longer there.



(Above, from left to right) Nebraska State Historical Society staff speak with Charlotte and Enedina Saucedo, sisters whose family members built adobe houses. They also shared local history at the Public Forum held at the Guadalupe Center in Scottsbluff on Oct. 30.

2015 Day of the Dead Events in Nebraska



(Above, from left to right) A retablo at the West Nebraska Arts Center was part of a Dia de los Muertos presentation and exhibition in Scottsbluff, photo by Travis Sell of the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. NLAC's Day of the Dead exhibit at the Capitol Building from Oct. 26-Nov. 6 featured artwork from high school students at Hastings Catholic School and the LPS Arts & Humanities Program. Mexican Consul Guadalupe Sanchez Salazar gives a public presentation on Dia de los Muertos with the ofrenda at the Consulado de Mexico en Omaha. (Left) The Latino Public Health Advisory Committee hosted a Dia de los Muertos celebration with an ofrenda and presentation at the UNMC College of Public Health in Omaha. (Right) The Multicultural Coalition of Grand Island hosted the Day of the Dead Festival with a 5K run, vendors, workshops and performances by the Aztec Fire Dancers on Oct. 24, photos by Mike Herod. (Below & Below Left, Right) The Mexican American Historical Society of the Midlands presented a series of Dia de los Muertos events with exhibitions, performances, and ofrendas, including one honoring soldiers, at St. Cecilia's Cathedral in Omaha, photos by MAHSM Director Jose Garcia, below right photo by Elite Studio Photography. (All photos reprinted with permission.)



Pieces of Nebraskan Hispanic History

Ramon Tapia: From Prisoner to Prison Reformer

"In the Biting Stage: The 1955 Nebraska State Penitentiary Riots and Violent Prison Activism," written by Brian Sarnacki, was originally published in the 96th Volume of "Nebraska History" in Spring 2015. Excerpts and photographs have been reprinted with permission by the Nebraska State Historical Society. For the complete article online, visit: www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/index

On August 16, 1955, Lincoln residents saw smoke rising from the Nebraska State Penitentiary after rioting inmates set fire to their workplaces. The event culminated in a series of violent protests meant to draw attention to the inhumane conditions and abuse by guards.

Ramon "Ray" Tapia was one of the prison inmates who organized the riot after exhausted attempts to have conditions addressed. According to an NET Special by Bill Kelly, he was in prison for armed robbery.

He described the Penitentiary as "a bleak and miserable place to live." In 1954, inmates sent a letter to the Omaha World-Herald voicing their treatment and frustration. The Board of Control convened hearings in January 1955 to investigate conditions with Tapia as one of the inmates who testified. Then-Governor Victor Anderson hired a new director of state penal institutions, but kept the current warden and deputy warden, both were accused by inmates of abusing their power.

In March 1955, the legislature's budgetary committee inspected the Penitentiary and deducted that tensions had subsided. A week later, Tapia along with 12 inmates captured guards and took control of the "jail" within the penitentiary. They sent down a note calling for reform that included: ending indefinite segregation sentences, three hot meals a day with a table, adequate medical attention, firing certain guards, better treatment for mentally ill patients, and overall improvements.

Governor Anderson called these demands "reasonable" and promised an investigation. After the hostages were released, Anderson personally met with Tapia who had been chosen as the inmates' spokesperson. After sharing grievances, the inmates agreed to six months punishment. Tapia described their plan as "desperate and deadly" with using violence as a stunt. One hostage said the inmates "didn't want much for themselves, but wanted changes in treatment."

Governor Anderson did oust Warden Hann, which was an inmate demand. However, he replaced him with Joseph Bovey, who did not have experience with the prison system, thus disappointing inmates.

On August 16, Tapia and an inmate blocked the doors to the mess hall requesting to speak with Warden Bovey after two inmates were punished in a way that was viewed as an abuse of power. A fire was started, which Tapia said was not part of the plan, but it did succeed in getting the public's attention. Warden Bovey removed all of the guards leaving the inmates in charge who set fire to the cannery, furniture shop, machine shop, maintenance shop, and store. With the National Guard and police as backup, Warden Bovey called for a surrender or else they would take back the prison under the orders of shoot to kill. The inmates surrendered. The damages were estimated to be

(Right) Ramon "Ray" Tapia in 1955. (Below) The Lincoln Star newspaper, now known as the Lincoln Journal Star newspaper, daily issue in 1955 of the day of the prison riot Tapia organized. Photos courtesy of the Nebraska State Historical Society and reprinted with permission.



\$100,000. In the riot aftermath, the Nebraska Board of Control hired Sanford Bates, former head of the federal prison system, to assess the prisons. Tapia was one of the inmates he questioned for his report. Tapia recalled that guards were "mostly uneducated" and many stayed in dorms because they could not afford housing. Since they lived in similar conditions, guards developed a "Gestapo mentality." He remembered punishment practices as severely outdated including isolation without amenities and being sent to "the hole" where they were isolated and fed once every three days.

Bates recommended hiring mental health professionals, creating a department for statistical research, and adding a trained state director. He also suggested better guards with better training and increased pay. He blasted punishment practices, especially "the hole."

The Board of Control created a new position to oversee the prison system and hired an experienced administrator. In 1956, a new, larger penitentiary building opened and the 19th-century furnishings were replaced. In 1959, Maurice Sigler became Warden, bringing with him the years of experience and reform the inmates wanted.

In the NET Documentary, Tapia said after the riot he decided to change. Warden Sigler asked him what he had done to have spent almost four years in "the hole," with Tapia responding that he had burned the prison down. Sigler would introduce GED classes among other changes to the prison. Tapia completed his GED, was released in 1963, and four years later he was married with children and a steady job.

Forty years later, Tapia drove to Florida to thank former Warden Sigler for the reform he finally brought to Lincoln. Sigler passed away in 2009 at the age of 100-years-old. Tapia currently lives in Colorado with his family that now includes grandchildren and has written his memoir.

Upcoming Events

- **Holiday: December 25**
Christmas Day
- **Holiday: January 1**
New Year's Day
- **Session 1st Day: January 6**
Nebraska Legislative Session 2016
- **Deadline: January 13**
Gates Millennium Scholarship Application
- **Deadline: January 15**
Dell Scholarship Application
- **Holiday: January 18**
Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday
- **Holiday: February 15**
President's Day
- **Meeting: February 27**
NLAC Quarterly Meeting - Lincoln

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2015 Latino Summit in Kearney



On Oct. 27, NLAC and the Dept. of Education presented the 12th Annual Latino Summit for 600 Latino students from 30 school districts. College recruiter tables like UNO (Above) answered questions and provided financial aid information. Keynote Speaker Lina Traslavina (Left) shared the importance of self-confidence. Multiple breakout sessions included Carmen Montes and NET (Below Left) and Ross Pesek (Below Right). (Bottom Left to Right) The Gallery of Stars shared student biographies. Students enjoyed a trivia game at lunch.

